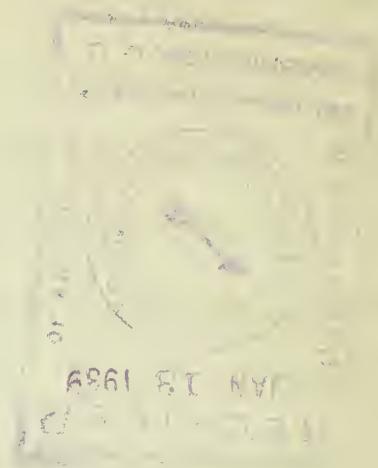


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F O R T U N E S   W A S H E D   A W A Y

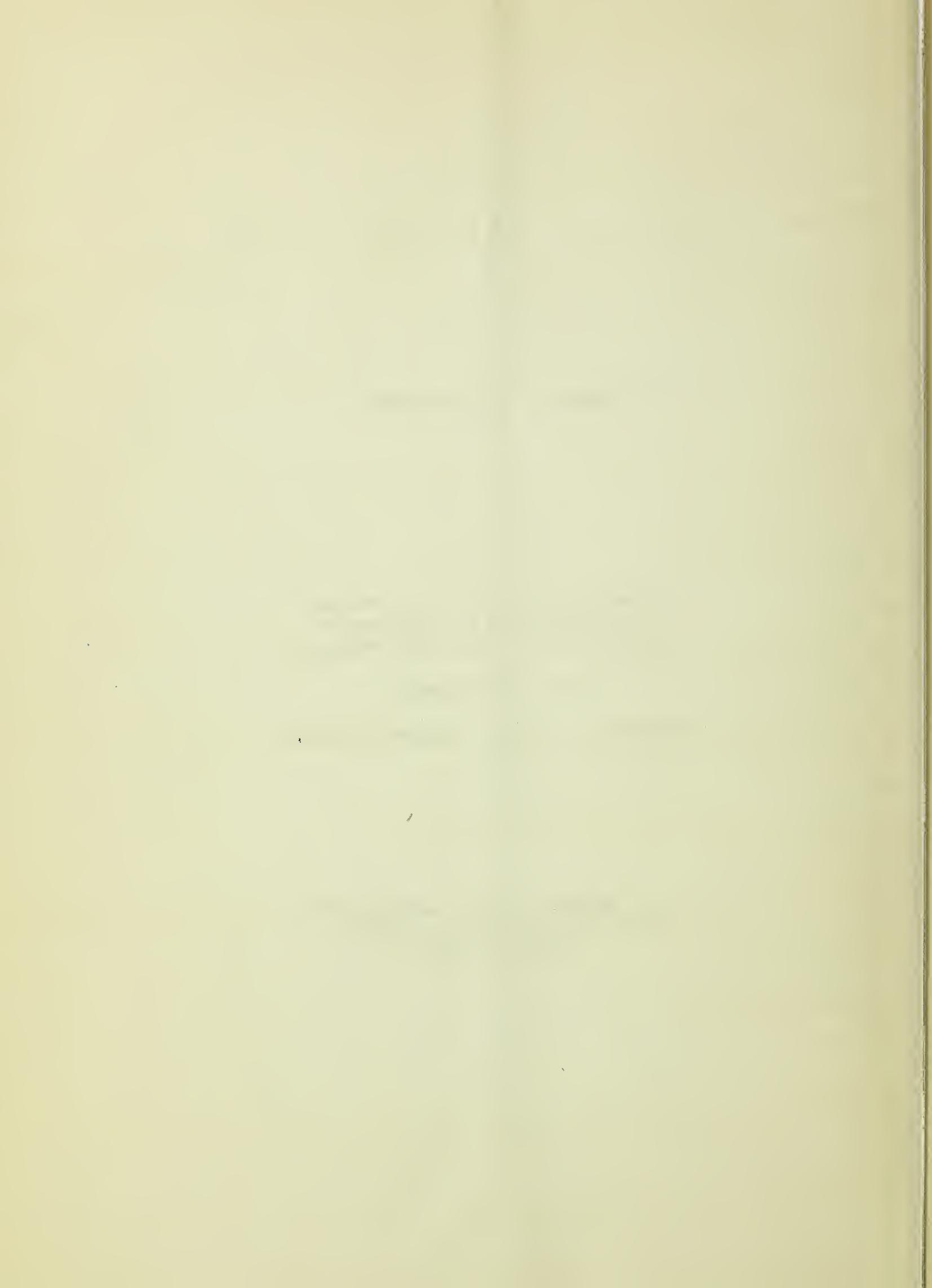
"DOWN TO NEW ORLEANS"

Broadcast No. 39 in a series  
of discussions of soil con-  
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

January 21, 1939 6:45-7:00 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE  
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

Five years before the Declaration of Independence was signed, George Washington explored the upper regions of the Ohio River. Where Moundsville, West Virginia, stands today, he laid claim to a level tract which the Mound Builders had long used for burial ground. His was a keen eye for good land, for he chose most of the level ground in all this part of the wilderness. For hills look down upon this level ground, hills sloping down to the river, hills which wind inland, hills which have been cleared since that day. And countless tons of fertile soil from their sides have muddied the broad Ohio and the even broader Mississippi...down to New Orleans. In the fall of 1770, there were quiet forests of giant oak, maple, pine, and walnut on these hills which echoed to the passing of Washington's survey party...

SOUND: Axes chopping brush in distance...

WASHINGTON (off mike)

Hark, Will! Blaze the east side of the great oak up there. (pause)  
Tell the brushmen to keep straight ahead.

VOICE IN DISTANCE

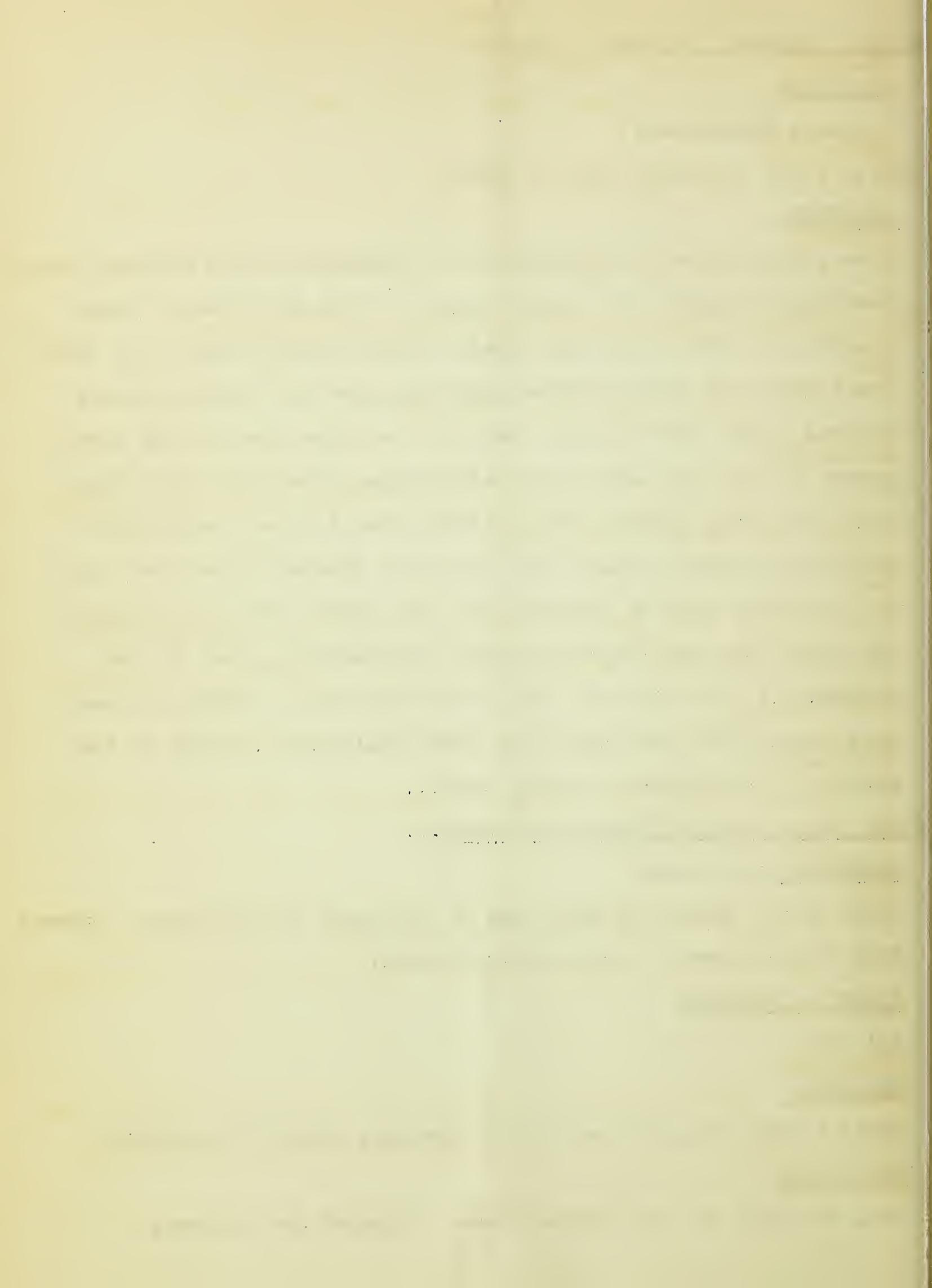
All set.

BENJAMIN

Shall I note the great oak in the drawing, Colonel Washington?

WASHINGTON

Yes, and mark the big boulder where I studied the compass.



BENJAMIN

Very well. Oh, the chain is off line at yonder draw.

WASHINGTON

No matter. Call the men in and we'll eat. It's after noon.

BENJAMIN

Ho, there! Ho! All in!

SOUND: Distant cries, breaking thru brush, approaching...

WILL

Hard work climbing that tree, Colonel.

WASHINGTON

Sure it's hard work, but that's the last tree you'll have to climb today. Pass the waterbag, Will.

WILL

Here you are, sir. Yes, it's been a hard day. I wouldn't mind being back in Fairfax County where we don't have these infernally thick forests.

WASHINGTON

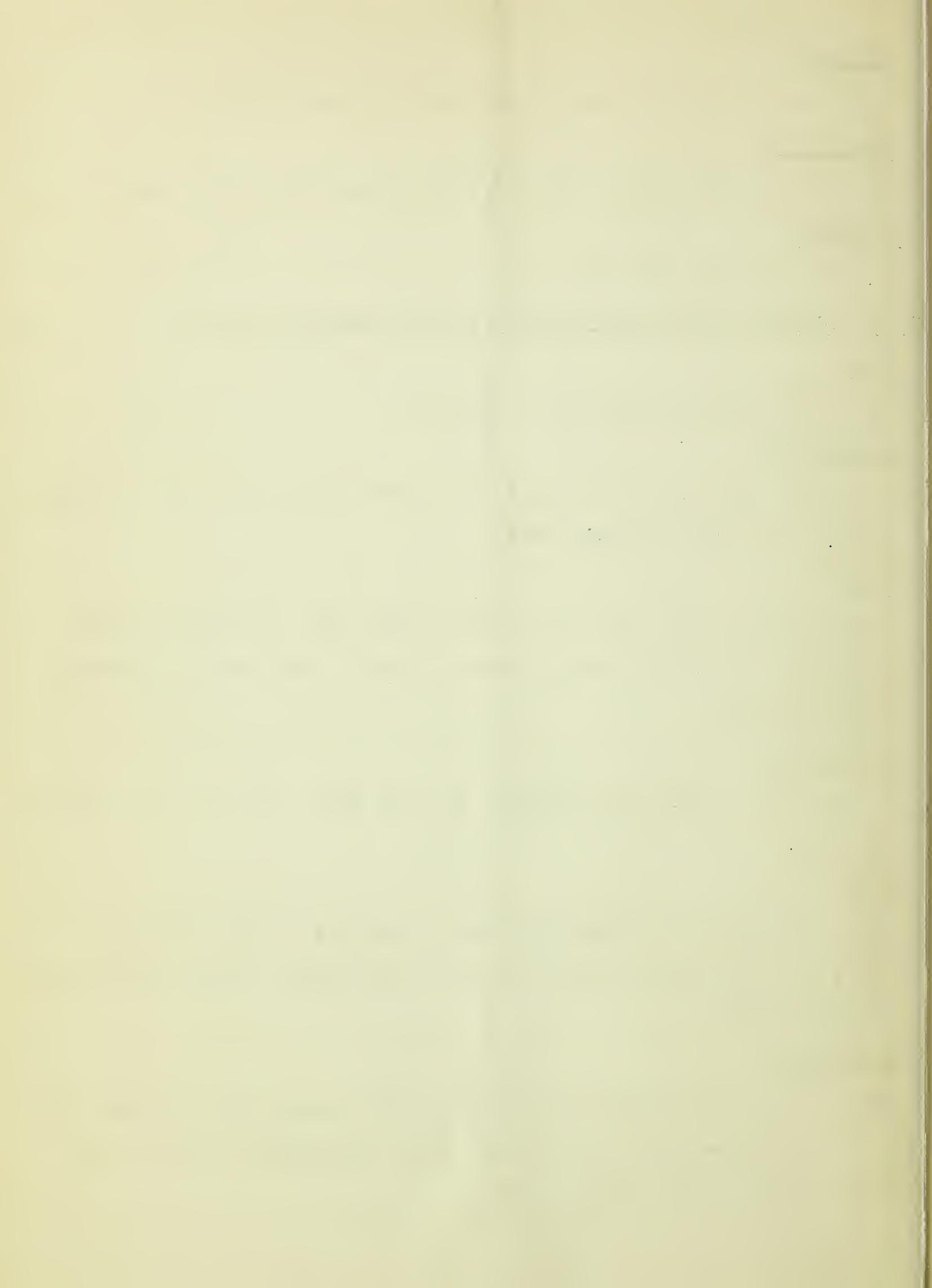
Be cheerful, Will. This task'll be done soon, then back to Fairfax we'll go.

WILL

Aye! We marked the plus 100 stone yesterday. There's not much more. Are you going to file claim on that round bottom we surveyed this morning?

WASHINGTON

That I am. There hasn't been such a level place since we left Fort Pitt days ago-- except that place where the Indians used to bury their dead, up the river a piece.



BENJAMIN

-3-

That round bottom would make fine corn land, but I wouldn't want to farm these hills. Do you think people will be coming here soon, Colonel?

WASHINGTON

The colonies are growing fast, Benjamin. People will be here before you and I are much older. And they'll be farming the hills, too.

WILL

But their crops will wash away.

WASHINGTON

Not if they are careful farmers, Will. If they grow tobacco, yes. But if they bring in cows and clear the tops of the ridges for pastures, it will be all right.

BENJAMIN

Oh, it doesn't matter. If they ruin the hills there's always more land beyond the river.

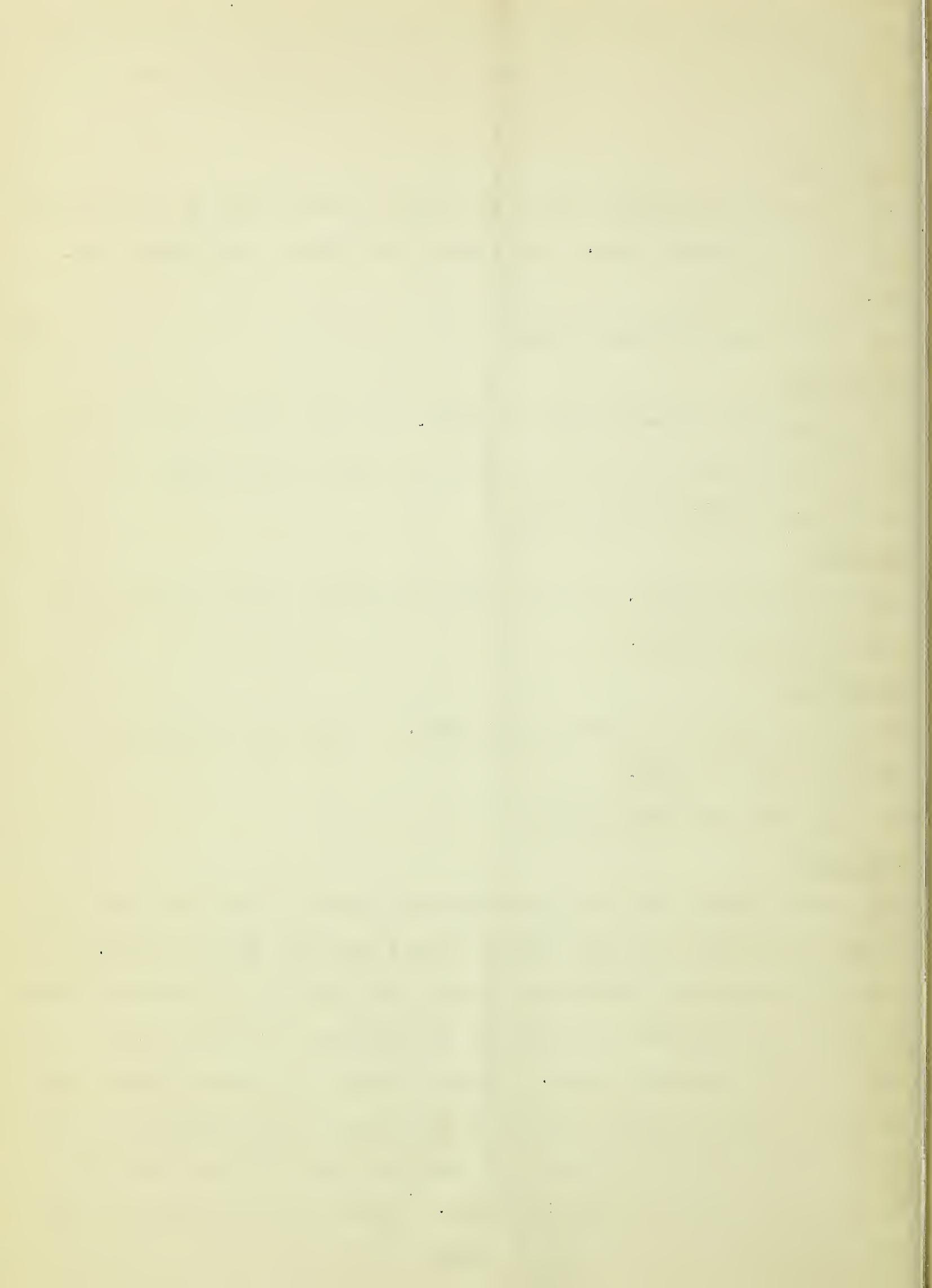
WASHINGTON

That's not careful husbandry, Benjamin. A man should love his land and keep it good.

ORGAN: THE WEST VIRGINIA HILLS.

ANNOUNCER

Five years later, the first settlers did arrive, began the arduous labor of clearing the more gentle slopes near the water's edge. Soon the flourishing down-river demand for flour and whisky led them to clear all the land, up and over the hilltops towering 5 to 7 hundred feet above the river. Erosion began its work. Before West Virginia became a state, wheat yields dropped to 10 bushels to the acre. Before the prairie sods of Iowa had been broken, abandoned farms dotted the West Virginia hills. Slowly farmers began to turn from cash grain crops to seek a system that was kinder to their hillside soils...



SOUND: Babble of voices.

VOICE (off mike)

How much for a pair of sheep shears, storekeeper?

JOHN

Hello, Sam, bringing in your wool, I see.

SAM

800 pounds of it!

JOHN

Oh ho! And the doc tells me he delivered a new baby at your house last week.

SAM

Yessirree! Another boy. Makes four and two girls, now.

JOHN

It's a fine thing to have a family like that coming along, Sam. Especially when you got boys old enough to help you farm.

SAM

Oldest boy helped me shear wool this year. The way some of my fields are wearing away, though, there won't be much farm left by the time the rest get growed up. At least there won't be any grain fields.

JOHN

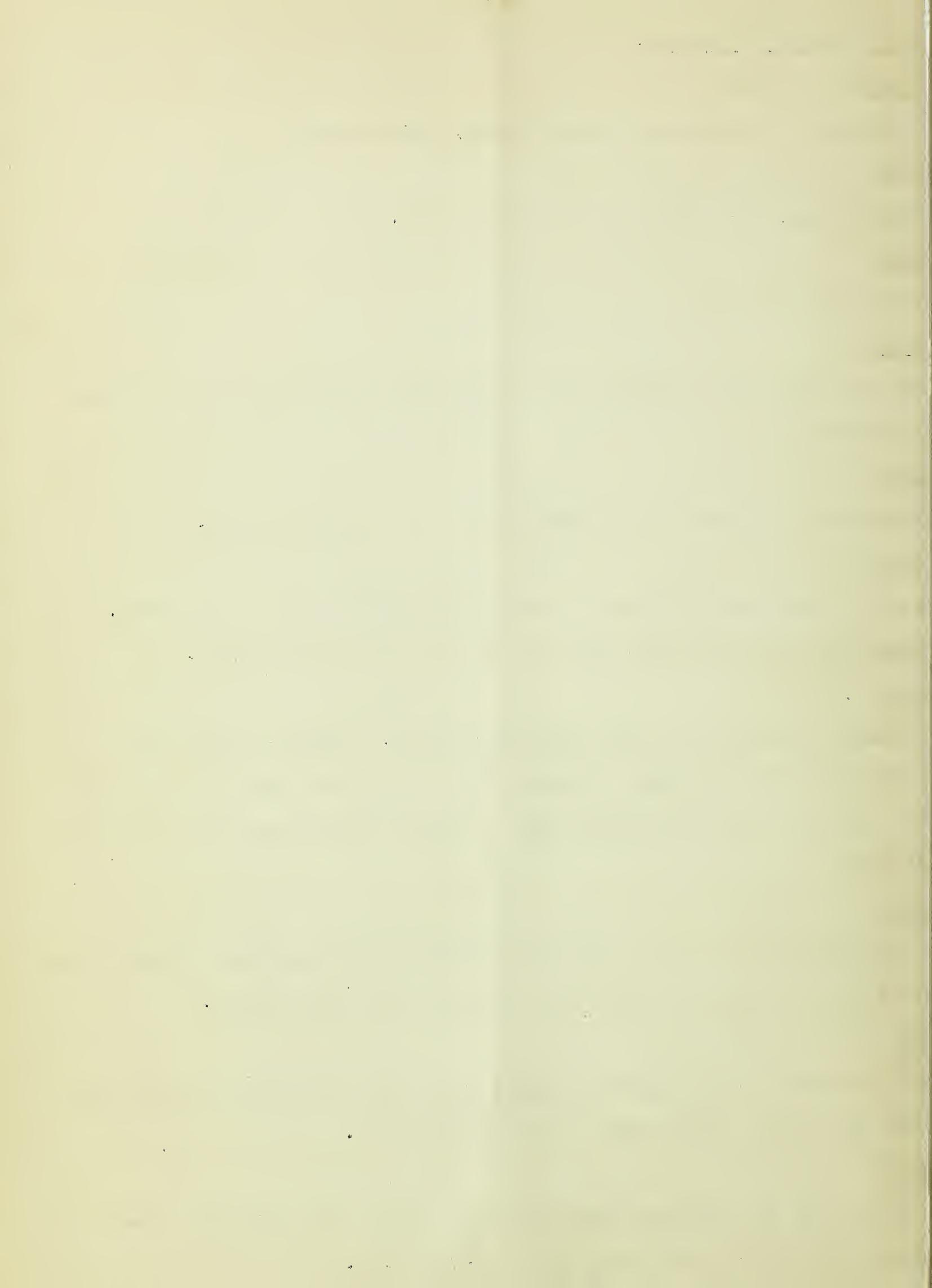
I can mind when I was a boy, when Jackson was president, these hills used to grow grain so thick you couldn't see the ground.

SAM

Yeh, I know. I only got 25 bushel last year from that little field near my house. That's why I got these sheep.

JOHN

A couple of my neighbors gave up their farms last year and moved away. You can't grow grain on worn-out land.



SAM

Most all the men I know are starting in the sheep business. I guess grass is the only thing for these hills.

ORGAN: THE WEST VIRGINIA HILLS.

ANNOUNCER

Grain farming declined. Wool was king for a generation--then steel came into the Upper Ohio Valley at the end of the century. In came swarming thousands. And to meet the needs of this vast market for food and dairy products, farmers turned to diversified agriculture. As they plowed their ridges and knobs for corn to feed their new cattle, they found it easier to farm around the hill in strip fields, rather than up and down hill in solid fields. Forty years ago, Dorey Wolfe of Ohio County, West Virginia, got the strip cropping idea...

SOUND: Cart being hauled up hill, groaning and creaking, horses snorting.

EARL (off mike)

Hey, there, Dorey! What you doin' haulin' dirt up the hill in that cart?

DOREY

Come on down, Earl. (pause) This is some dirt last week's rain washed down the hill.

EARL

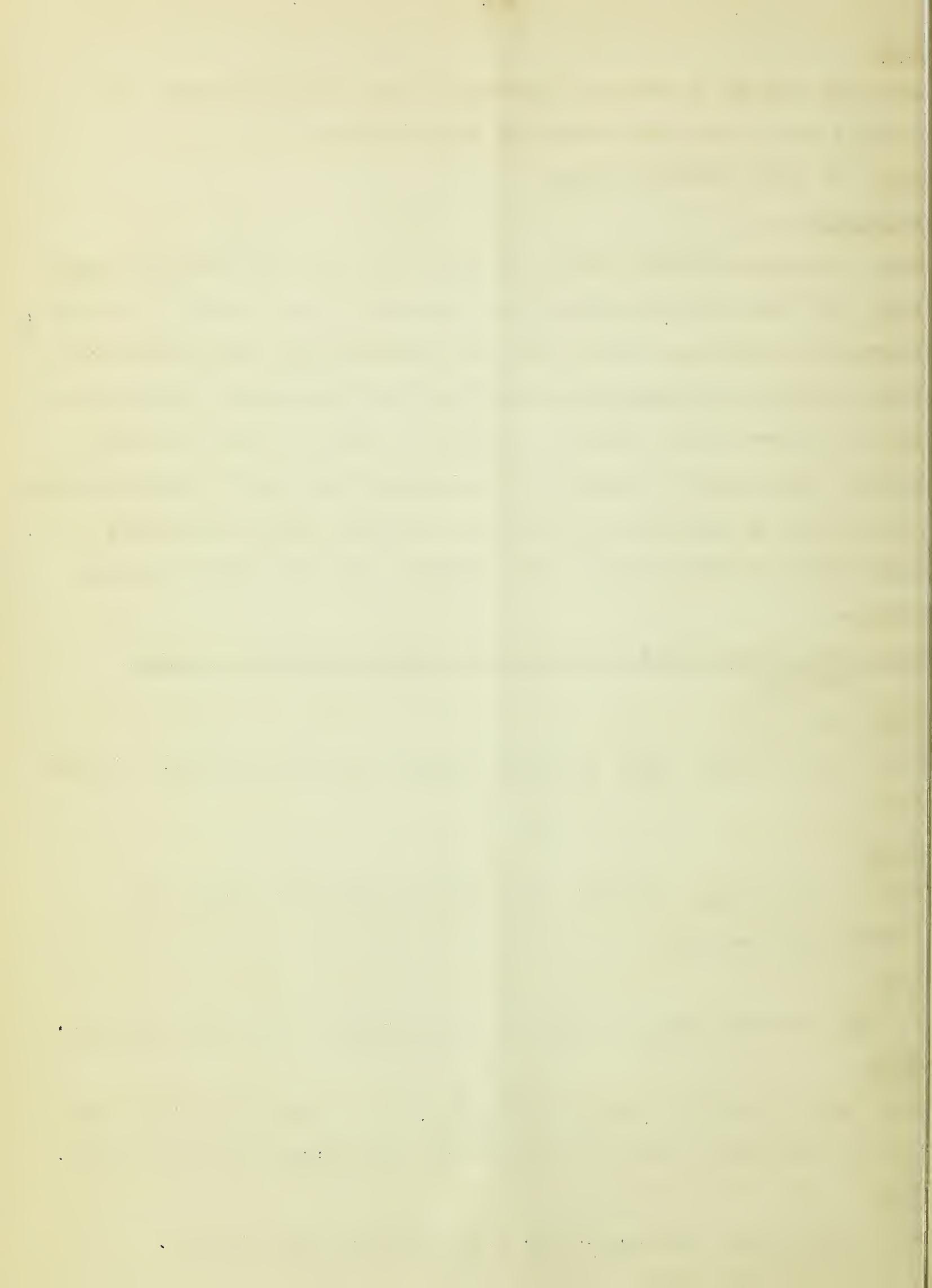
Thought you were strip farmin' so's you wouldn't have any gullies.

DOREY

I've been farmin' in strips all right, but I sorta slipped up this spring. Thought I could get away with plowin' the whole hillside.

EARL

Why'd you figure that way? I'd a thought you knew better.



DOREY

Well, my seedin' for the meadow strips didn't catch so well this spring, so I just plowed the hill, lock, stock, and barrel.

EARL

Yes...and look at that gully. Looks like that big ditch they're gonna build down in Panama.

DOREY

Pretty bad, all right. And this is the 20th carload I've hauled and it still needs more plugging.

EARL

That's a long hill to plow all the way--lots of room for the rain to rip and tear. Strip farmin' is the only way to keep these hills where they belong--and they belong here.

DOREY

You're right, Earl. Grass catch or no grass catch, I'm never plowin' this solid again. And you'll notice I'm plowin' my corn strips narrower this fall.

EARL

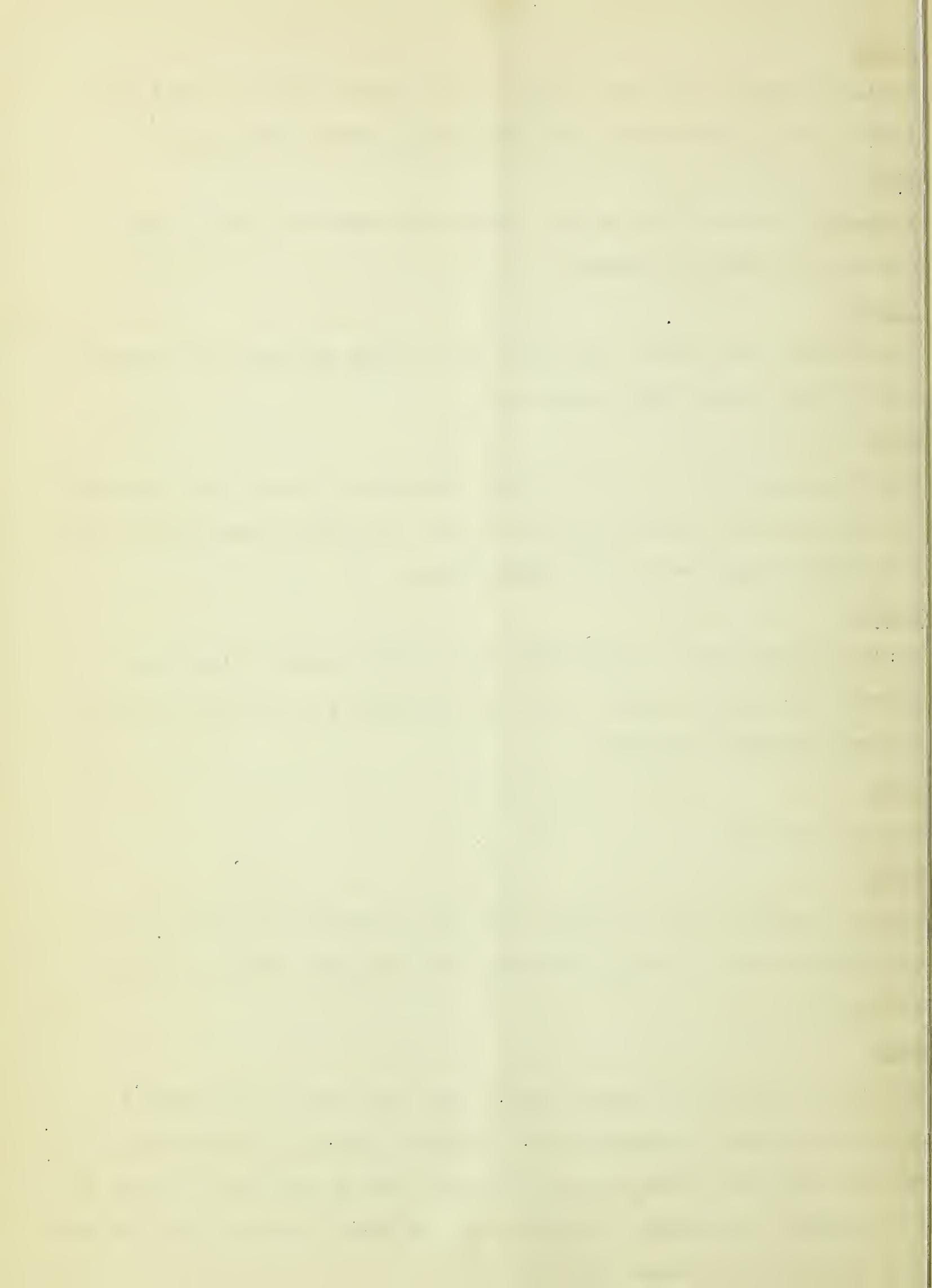
What's the idea?

DOREY

Well, I figured those gullies down there wouldn't be there if my corn strips were a little narrower and the grass strips a little wider.

EARL

You've got something there, Dorey. And you know, this farmin' around the slope in strips pays. Take my farm. My crops are gettin' better. My uncle used to tell me about how he wore out a piece of land plowin' it solid. Seems to me, now that I think of it, he was just a mite proud about it, too.



DOREY

Believe me, this is one piece of land that is not goin' to wear off. I'm tired of sendin' my soil...down to New Orleans.

ORGAN: THE WEST VIRGINIA HILLS.

ANNOUNCER

And so, more than thirty years ago, Dorey Wolfe and his neighbors practiced soil conservation on the steep ridges in Ohio, Marshall, and Brooke counties. In 1938, Dorey Wolfe, making a better job of farming than ever, got 600 bushels of good corn from 11 acres... good corn, better corn than he had ever grown. And Dorey Wolfe, and his neighbors, will tell you that plenty of lime and fertilizer, plenty of good soil, and plenty of good soil conservation, is the only way to farm the West Virginia hills.

ORGAN: THE WEST VIRGINIA HILLS.

ANNOUNCER

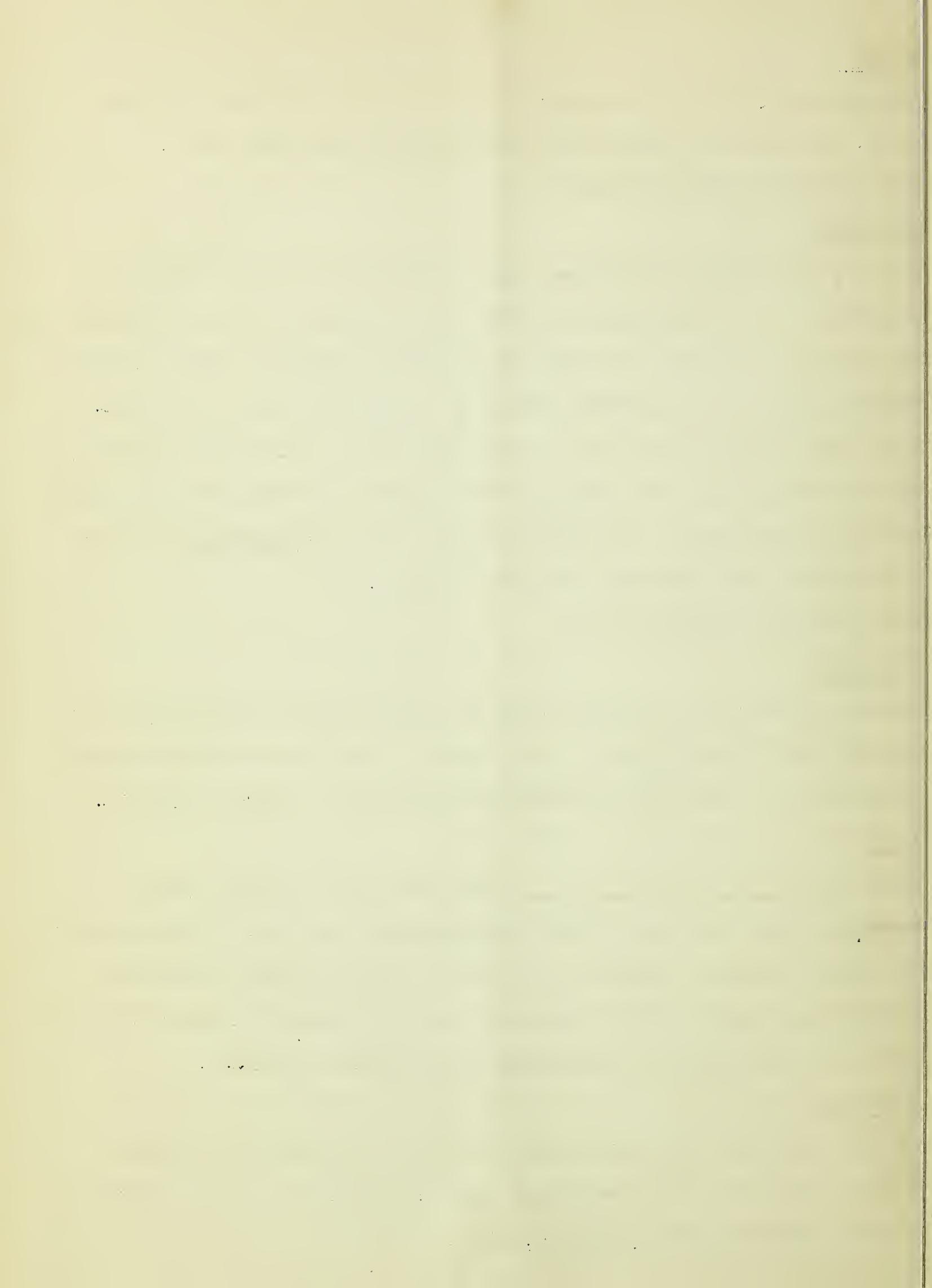
And now, let's continue exploring the West Virginia hills, and to further that investigation, let's turn to this week's investigator, Ewing Jones of the Soil Conservation Service, at Dayton, Ohio.

JONES

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_, for your usual cheery, warm, introduction. Now about this investigating business, I've explored the strip cropping annals a bit, and I find a bulletin entitled "Strip Cropping for Soil Conservation." 40 pages of factual information and photographs describing this system, and....

ANNOUNCER

Say no more. If you would like a copy of the bulletin, "Strip Cropping for Soil Conservation," send a letter or a penny postcard to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio.



JONES

You took the words right out of my mouth, and it wasn't like a bolt from the blue, either. But now, furthering our explorations, we find Mr. L. L. Lough, West Virginia state coordinator of the Soil Conservation Service. Mr. Lough, you used to be a county agent in the friendly hills of West Virginia, and you ought to know a lot of these West Virginia farmers who have strip cropped their fields for years.

LOUGH

I do know Dorey Wolfe, Ewing, and I know his farm. It's a good one. A lot of his neighbors in Ohio County have been strip farming for years, too, men like William P. Suppler, and Earl G. Johnson, who have farms near Roneys Point. They'll tell you that strip cropping and plowing on the level are the only ways to farm the steep hills in that country.

JONES

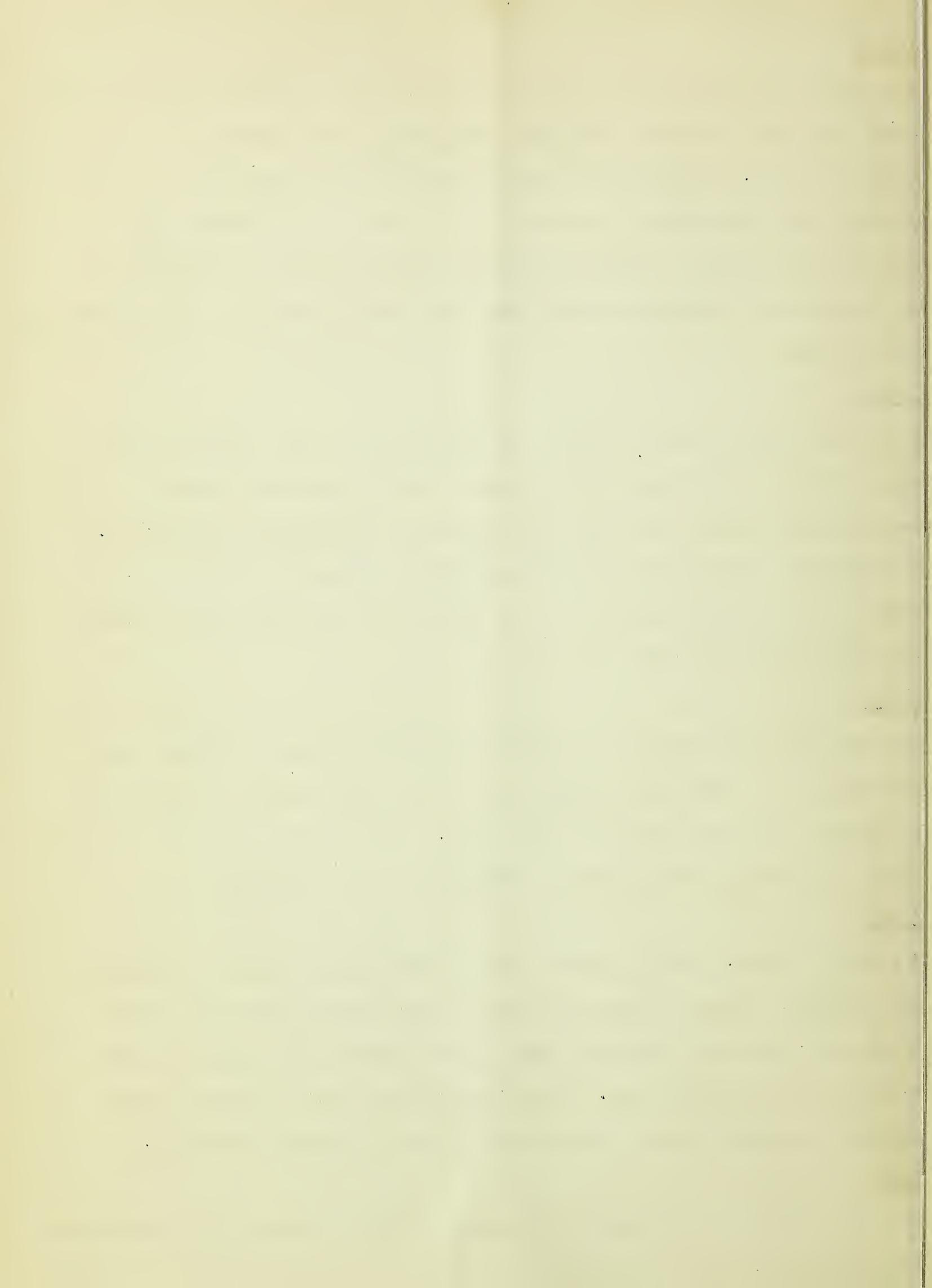
And men like that have the feeling of conservation, I know. And they know what kind of farming will cause soil wash, and what kind of farming will keep the soil at home. But did all of these farmers start to farm in strip fashion because of soil erosion?

LOUGH

Not all of them. Soil erosion was an important reason, but there were others. Some of them started to plow around the hill just about the time that tractors were first coming into general use, just before the World War. That was because some of those early tractors couldn't pull a plow over the hill without stalling.

JONES

But has a large percentage of farmers in this northern West Virginia panhandle been strip farming?



LOUGH

Well, I'll tell you. I looked at some aerial maps of Brooke County the other day, in the office of County Agent W. C. Gist.

JONES

And did you see many strips?

LOUGH

They came in parcels--a few farms here and a few farms there. Most of the strips, though, were still a little bit too wide to control erosion.

JONES

But as I said a moment ago, these farmers have the feel of conservation. That means that they are using other conservation measures besides strip cropping.

LOUGH

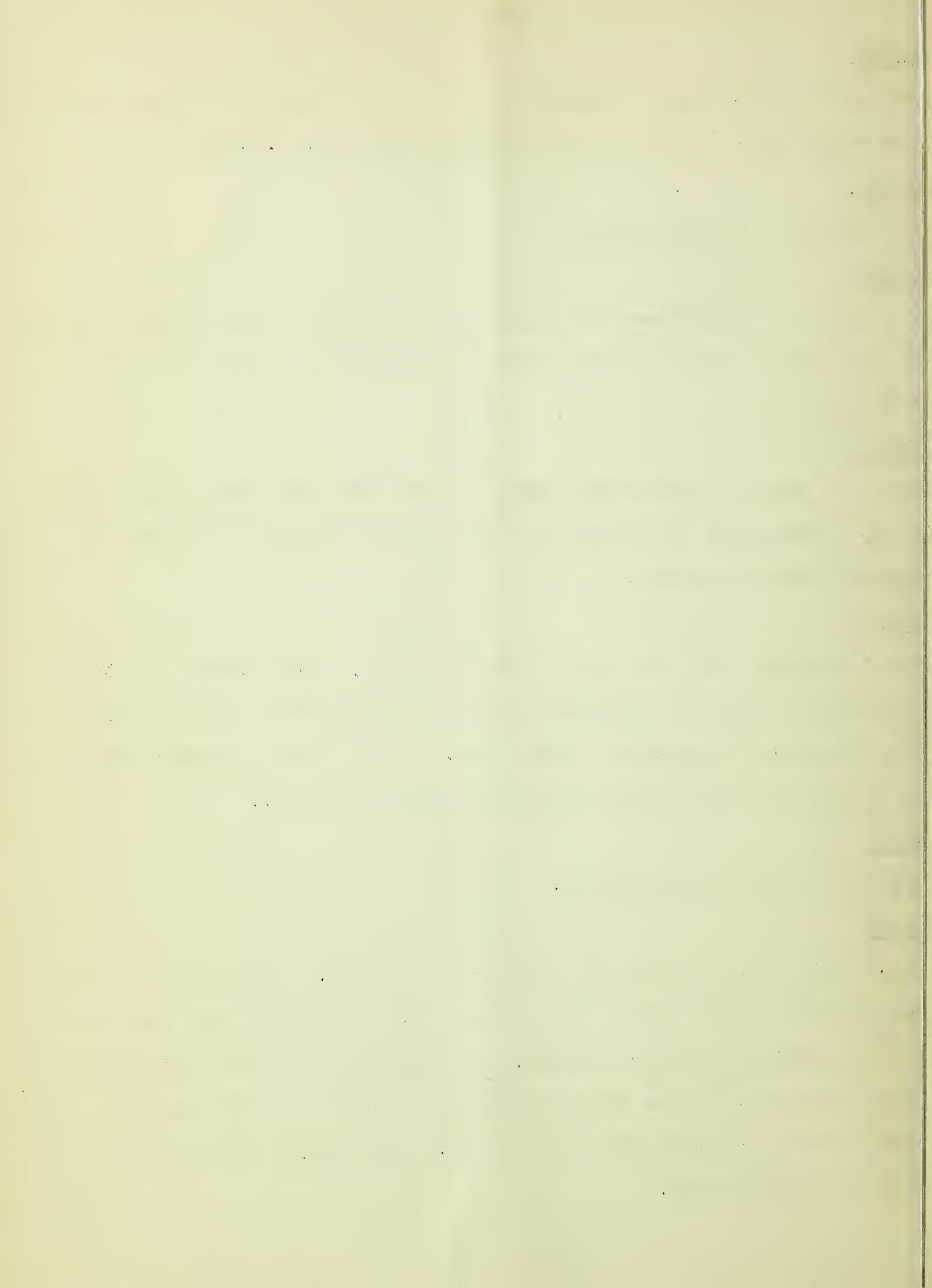
That's right. You can look in the bulletin, "Soil Defense in the Northeast," and find out about these measures, and a lot of these West Virginia farmers are using them. Let me tell you about Albert P. Meyers who owns a farm on Route 88 near Girard...

JONES

...that's in Marshall County.

LOUGH

Yes. He's been farming in strips for 2½ years. The two farms he was raised on were all strip cropped, heavily fertilized and the gullies grassed over or plugged. He bought his present farm only four years ago, and he tells us that the previous owner used to plow his crop fields solid every year. Naturally, a lot of the soil was washed away.



JONES

I guess the farm wasn't worth much when Mr. Meyers got it four years ago.

LOUGH

No, it wasn't. Washed farms are usually the kind you can buy pretty cheap. For one thing, the previous owner had grown corn ten years in a row on a steep place near the road and it was badly gullied. Since Mr. Meyers got the farm he's filled in gullies in this field. He's also built up the hillside soil by giving it good cover crop protection and treating it with plenty of lime and fertilizer. Now he's seriously thinking about the possibilities of a diversion ditch to handle roadside water which cuts into the field in one place.

JONES

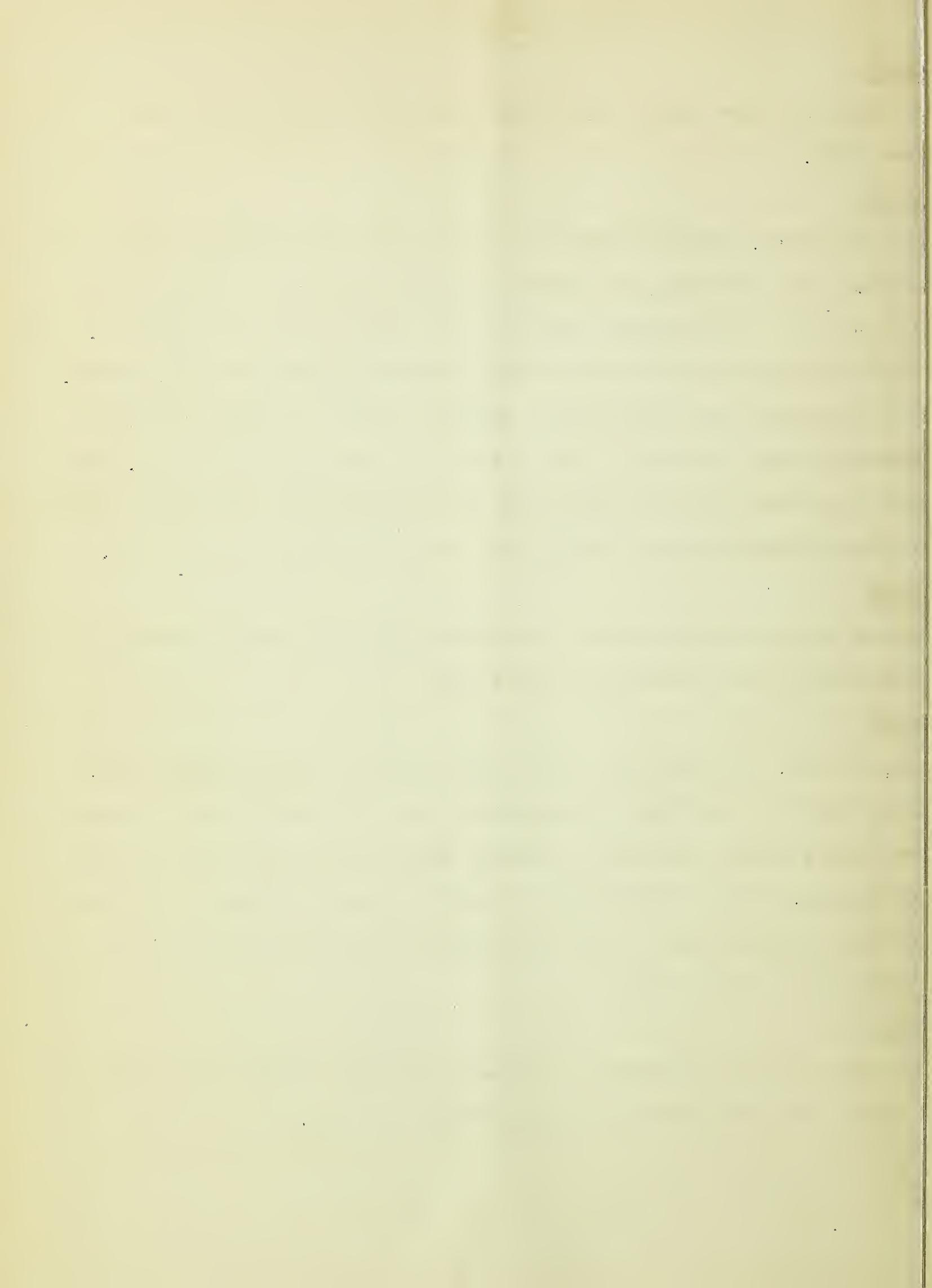
By the way, did Meyers tell you whether the soil itself was any different on the farms of 25 years ago?

LOUGH

Yes, he did. He said that on the farm where he was working then, there wasn't a wash that you couldn't drive a binder over. He said the fields didn't wash the slightest bit because the soil was rich and spongy. By the time he got around to owning a farm of his own, though, he found most of the soil around there was getting to be a little like a barn roof.

JONES

How about the crop yields in that section, Mr. Lough? Most farmers, I should say all farmers, are interested in that.



LOUGH

Well, Mr. Meyers, among others, says that the fields which have been strip cropped and fertilized are still producing as good crops as they did 40 years ago. The pastures that have been treated are as good now as they ever were. Most of those that haven't been, cropland and pasture both, aren't doing so well.

JONES

You know, the more you study conservation the more you realize that it isn't new. First of all, George Washington practiced it on his West Virginia plantation. Now you're telling us today that farmers in the West Virginia Panhandle knew about strip cropping and other conservation measures before I was born.

LOUGH

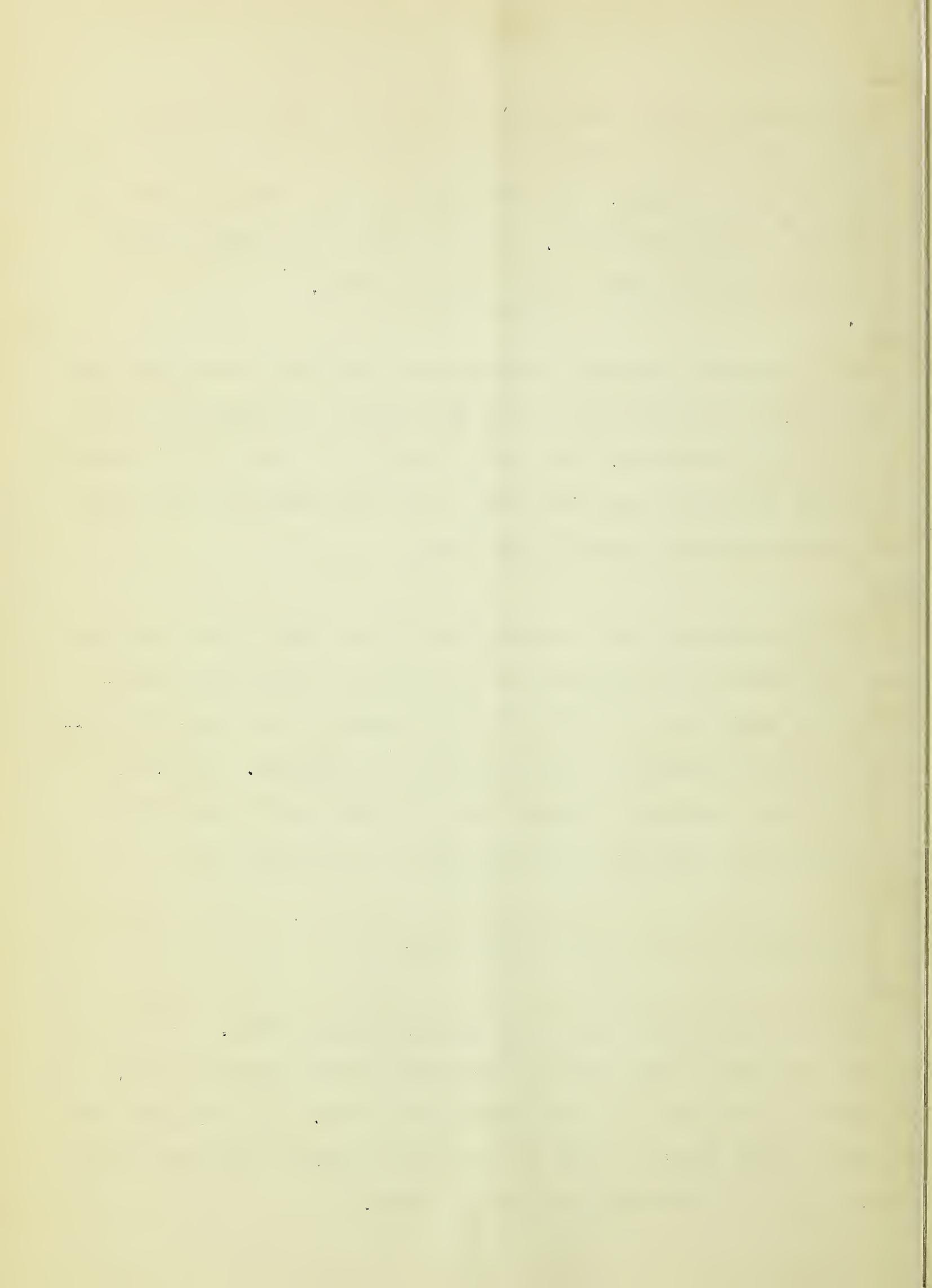
That's right, Ewing. Soil conservation is not new. A lot has been done, but there's a tremendous lot yet to do. We've been demonstrating on small areas in West Virginia--and in the other states-- how to go about planning a farm conservation program. But there are still many millions of acres where farmers aren't yet strip cropping or doing the other things conservation calls for.

JONES

You don't have to travel far to see that.

LOUGH

It's going to take more than these demonstration areas. It's going to take more than a few farmers practicing strip cropping, too. It's going to take all farmers working together. If they organize and decide that they're going to fight this erosion problem themselves, why, I think we'll get the job done.



JONES

And from the foresight of those West Virginia farmers, they'll get both inspiration and experience. And thank you for your helpful comments, Mr. L. L. Lough, state coordinator of the Soil Conservation Service, in West Virginia, where men farm the hills...and where they're learning to farm them right.

ANNOUNCER

And now, Ewing, I suppose you're going to repeat that offer about the bulletin on strip cropping. Or are you going to offer a bulletin...as usual.

JONES

No, I'm not going to offer a bulletin, as usual.

ANNOUNCER

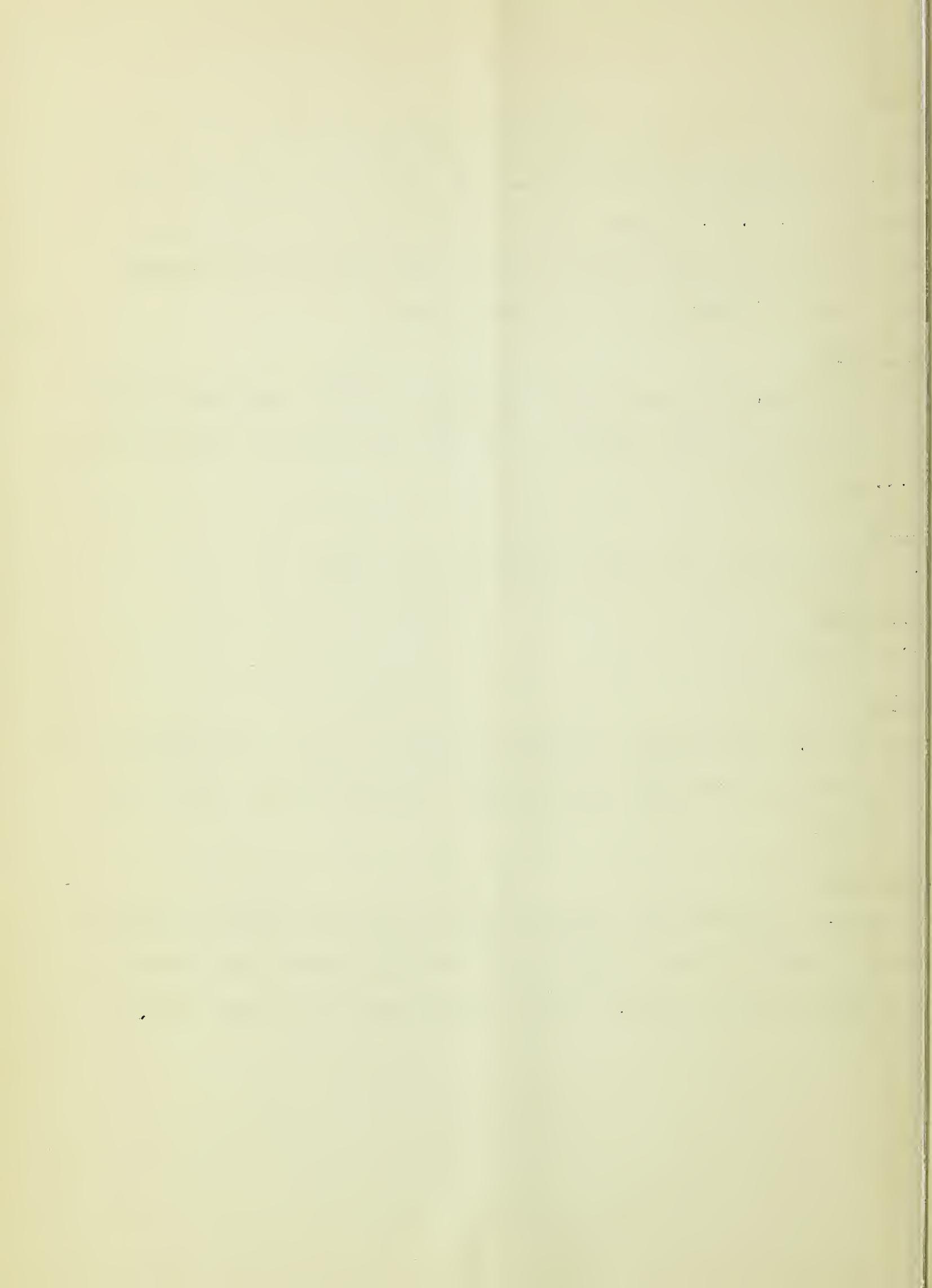
You're not?

JONES

No, I'm not. Of course, if anybody wants a copy of the bulletin on strip cropping, or that new bulletin, "Soil Defense," we'll send it to them.

ANNOUNCER

Oh, I see. You're not going to offer a bulletin, but if anybody wants a copy of "Strip Cropping" or "Soil Defense", and writes to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio, you'll send it to them anyway.



JONES

You get the idea all right. I might add that the bulletin, "Soil Defense in the Northeast," has several pages that describe parts of the West Virginia Panhandle that George Washington surveyed. That was a long time ago. And today, a century and a half later, farmers in those same friendly hills of West Virginia know the value of soil conservation...soil defense.

ANNOUNCER

Next week, "The Corn King of Indiana."

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away is a studio presentation of the agriculture department of the Nation's Station.

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